

Positive tech disruption drives 2022 business trends

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Business and technology disruption have been common themes over the last two years. More than ever, decision-makers are under pressure to harness the potential of digital solutions and apply it to their corporate environment to help ensure differentiation, growth, and competitiveness. A part of this is being mindful of several key trends that will continue to shape the South African landscape as we head into 2022.



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Digitisation, datafication, virtualisation

The acceleration of digital transformation initiatives has become commonplace. Companies want to outperform their competitors and they need a digital-centric approach built around an increasing focus on data and virtualisation to do so.

Projects that used to take five or six months have now been accelerated, but in the rush to digitalise solutions and enhance processes, the pain points have been exacerbated. Increasingly, companies will become aware of the need to harness customised solutions that can be moulded around customer needs. A balance must therefore be maintained between a plug-and-play approach and one that requires bespoke development.

The golden thread tying digitisation, datafication, and virtualisation together will be customer-centricity, gaining a better understanding of their needs. To do so requires access to relevant and accurate data, which will push companies across sectors to become more data-driven. With this comes an understanding of what motivates clients and how the company can deliver products and services to help drive that.

More than ever, companies must respond to evolving customer requirements far more rapidly than in the past. This is where leadership plays a critical role. As much as this trend is focused on technologies and data, there must be an organisational desire to change. Leadership must therefore drive it and position the business to become more data-savvy and digitally driven to future-proof itself.

Next year will see more companies going through this phase and having to rethink how to optimise their operations and even supply chains to affect the most value.

Reprioritising cybersecurity

Flowing from here, organisations must also reassess how their cybersecurity is managed and implemented in this digital-first world. The cloud remains vulnerable, especially when it comes to the migrating data phase of implementation. Things like encryption, authentication, audit logging, and the shared responsibility model between companies and their cloud service providers will become part of normal business operations.

Beyond this, there are things like mobile endpoint security to consider, especially for those employees still working from home. Suppliers could even begin to bundle more security features and software into devices as a value-add for their corporate customers, but better security is just one part of the equation.

Ongoing user education will remain critical to ensure employees are aware of the latest social engineering tactics, can identify them, and understand the steps they must follow if they become aware of a compromise. The hybrid work environment has seen phishing attacks increase and social engineering becoming the preferred way to compromise data and networks.

As part of their tactics to strengthen their cybersecurity stance, organisations might even start considering issuing mobile licences to users where they must show aptitude in cybersecurity best practice. These licences will assist in protecting users' data and information working from home. However, this cannot be a once-off. User upskilling and reskilling in this regard must be a continuous process.

Everything as a service

Fortunately, cybersecurity will become part of the shift to the normalisation of everything-as-a-service (XaaS). This combines customer-centricity, becoming data-driven, moving to the cloud, and strengthening cyber defences as an integrated value proposition.

More service providers will start introducing these managed solutions to create increased sustainable income. Of course, the flip side of this is that when corporate customers go the XaaS route, the service providers must prove their value monthly to drive resubscriptions. From the corporate customer perspective, XaaS will enable them to move away from the traditional mindset of having to sweat assets and be so focused on hardware that they miss out on the opportunities that data-centricity can provide.

Becoming more digitally-focused means companies can inject a level of agility into their processes that they did not have before. It also means that they need to identify relevant business use cases for XaaS that highlight the benefits in a

demonstrable manner. Far too often, companies want to implement the latest technology without even considering how it will integrate into existing processes.

When the use case is identified, the customisability and scalability of cloud solutions help ensure the organisation can scale up and down much more effectively based on customer requests. It also means that understanding customer needs remain part of this trend just as it has been with the others.

The final component of XaaS is the need for companies to use one service provider. The past few years have shown that working with multiple service providers adds complexity which slows down innovation. Interoperability presents an additional challenge, using different providers means it becomes challenging to integrate all solutions (and data) into a cohesive approach.

The anywhere enterprise

Finally, this will give rise to the anywhere enterprise. With companies already working in distributed and hybrid environments, it is going to be less about a central location as it is about using digital solutions to tie operations together virtually.

All the value comes down to the data, how it is stored, secured, and accessed by employees, regardless of their geographical location. For companies, measuring employee performance in this environment is therefore not going to be around the number of hours worked but rather about the objectives they have accomplished on a given day.

This will also see company culture becoming more important as employees limit the number of face-to-face interactions and focus more on digital ones. Yes, technology has made it easier to facilitate virtual meetings, online collaboration, and the like. This puts the spotlight on leadership to position a 'new' company culture that is better reflective of this new normal.

One of the positives of this is that companies are now able to strengthen their local teams with resources from around the world. There is nothing stopping a local company employing people in other countries or even having local employees move to smaller towns and still fulfil their corporate obligations.

All told, 2022 is going to be an exciting year where the potential of marrying digital, cloud, data, and customer-centricity will become the driving force for growth and corporate innovation.

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